

MEDICAL LITERATURE.

ART. XV. *Memoir of the Life and Writings of the late COLIN CHISHOLM, M. D., F. R. S. &c. &c. formerly Inspector General of Ordnance Hospitals in the West Indies.**

A MILITARY life, under ordinary circumstances, seldom affords a favourable scope for the development of medical genius. The previous education, and peculiar habits of his profession, in some measure, unfit the medical officer for the passive duties of a subordinate sphere, whilst the various restraints and checks to which he becomes subject by the ungenial nature and undefined liabilities of military control, are so many discouragements to the acquirement of that elasticity and vigour of mind so essential to the improvement of the mental faculties. Notwithstanding these serious difficulties, added to those more immediately arising, in former days, from an imperfect organization of the medical department itself, and its undue estimation and respectability in the service in regard to rank and emolument, both the army and navy have given birth to many whose genius, surmounting the ordinary disadvantages of their station, has raised them to the first rank in medicine and surgery: not to mention several living instances of men whose knowledge and experience render them ornaments to medical science.†

Dr. Colin Chisholm, the subject of the following biographical sketch, was also one of those who commenced his career in the service of his country. He was a native of Invernesshire, in the north-west part of Scotland, where he was born in the year 1755.

He received his classical education at Inverness, and at Aberdeen, and studied medicine and surgery at Edinburgh. At an early age he entered the army, having been appointed surgeon to a corps of Highlanders, in the year 1775. This corps, of which the late Dr. ROBERT JACKSON, the eminent writer on army diseases, was the then assistant surgeon, became afterwards the second battalion of the seventy-first, (Highland,) regiment, and, together with the forty-

* We are indebted for this communication to Professor Hosack.

† Among the former, it may be sufficient to instance the names of Wiseman, Pringle, Cleghorn, Monro, Brocklesby, Hunter, &c.

second regiment, being destined for actual service in North America, sailed from Greenock for that country, in April, 1776; the sick of both corps being placed under Dr. Chisholm's superintendence during the passage. He continued to serve with the seventy-first regiment, in different parts of America, during the whole of the revolutionary contest. When peace was concluded, in 1783, he was placed on half-pay, and settled as a physician at St. Georges, the capital of Grenada, in the West Indies. A few years after he had established himself here, and principally, it is supposed, through the interest of his friend the late Dr. JOHN ROLLO, he was appointed his successor as surgeon to the ordnance stationed in that island. In the summer of 1794, he returned to Britain, the first time since his settlement in the colony, and, in the course of that year, married Miss Eliza Cooper, an amiable young lady of Inverness. In the autumn of 1795, he had conferred upon him the rank of surgeon-general to the ordnance employed upon the expedition under the command of that lamented and gallant officer, the late General Sir RALPH ABERCROMBY, which sailed from Portsmouth for the West Indies, on the 15th November of that year; but which, from heavy storms, and consequent disasters, was unable to reach its destination till the spring of 1796, and then only with the loss of several transports, shipwrecked or driven back by the great inclemency of the weather, which lasted for many successive weeks. In the year 1797 he received the appointment of inspector-general of ordnance hospitals in the Windward Islands. In this capacity, it became his duty to visit in person and regulate all the artillery hospitals in the different islands; a tour which afforded him abundant and profitable opportunities for instituting medical and statistical observation, and inquiries in that country, on a scale, and to an extent, seldom enjoyed by a single individual.

When the intended object of this appointment appeared to have been fully accomplished, the board of ordnance were highly sensible of his merits, and as a flattering testimony of their full approbation of his services, permitted him, at his own request, to retire from the department, granting him what was at that *time* deemed a handsome allowance, namely, ten shillings per diem for life.

We have now arrived at a period which forms an important epoch in the professional life of Dr. Chisholm; we are next to consider him in the character of an author; but more particularly, as the founder and ardent supporter of particular medical opinions, and doctrines relative to contagion, which furnished a wide and fertile subject for inquiry and keen controversy, amongst a certain class of medical authors and practitioners for many years afterwards.

In the year 1794, that is, immediately or very soon after his return to England the first time, he published a book, in one volume octavo, entitled "An Essay on the Malignant Pestilential Fever introduced into the West Indies from Boullam on the Coast of Guinea, as it appeared in 1793 and 1794." In this work, and under the above title, the doctor characterized a fever which, about that period, prevailed in a great and fatal degree, especially amongst the troops, in almost all the British West India islands. This fever he unequivocally pronounced to be highly and specifically contagious; and affirmed to have been introduced, or imported, in the first instance, into Grenada, (where it proved very fatal to the inhabitants of the colony,) through the medium of a ship called the *Hankey*; which vessel arrived there from the coast of Guinea in Africa, in the month of February, 1793; and, moreover, that this fever was propagated from thence, as from a common centre, to the other islands of the West Indies.

Whether the fever in question, so ably described by Dr. Chisholm in that valuable publication, actually and essentially differed otherwise than in degree from aggravated forms of tropical, or what is usually, but vaguely denominated, yellow fever, which, it is well known, have, on different occasions, and under unfavourable circumstances, made great and extraordinary havoc in the islands of the Antilles; or whether it was, as the doctor asserted it to be, a specific contagion, a *nova pestis*, imported, in the manner before stated, it is not within the scope or design of this memoir to inquire; particularly after the volumes which have been written by both sides on this disputed point.

Non nostrum est inter *hos* tantas componere lites. It may be sufficient for us to observe, that the high professional reputation, and integrity of character, which the author had justly acquired and sustained, during his long residence in the West Indies, added to the sterling merits of the work itself, gave such decided weight, and authority to the opinions and doctrines therein promulgated, that at first few persons were to be found sufficiently competent or venturesome to impugn them: and, in that quarter of the world, at least where their soundness or fallacy could be best appreciated, they appeared to have been received, for a very considerable time, with nearly universal consent.

In a second edition of the essay on malignant "Pestilential Fever," published in 1801, in two volumes, the doctor firmly adhering to his former opinions, widely extended the sphere of operation imputed to imported and specific febrile contagion; comprehending within its

vortex, and identifying the Boullain fever with the epidemic yellow fever which prevailed, with great fatality, about the autumn of 1793, and in subsequent years at Philadelphia, New York, and other places; and ascribing all those fevers to one common origin, namely, contagion, imported into, and communicated from the West Indies. The extension and devastating effects thus attributed to contagion, disseminated in such various and remote parts of the globe, may, in some measure, enable us to account for the accuracy of the doctor's hypothesis being questioned, and from the increasing opposition which his doctrine met with, and to which he indeed alludes in the same edition of his essay, for it may reasonably be supposed that some persons who had become willing converts at first, and, to a certain degree, implicitly bowed to his opinions as to the existence of incidental contagion; but who were not prepared to go so far as doctor Chisholm in ascribing to it a contagious quality of a specific nature, and far less in identifying it with destructive fevers which prevailed in other, and such very distant regions of the earth.

Some of the army medical officers, serving at that period in the West Indies, had, it seems, already doubted the soundness of his opinions; but it does not appear that his doctrines had as yet met with any serious or direct opposition through the medium of the press, until the year 1807, when Drs. MILLER and SMITH of New York, the former gentleman being the editor of the New York Medical Repository, publicly entered the lists of opposition in an official report addressed to the governors of the state of New York. In 1811 Dr. EDWARD NATHANIEL BANCROFT, physician to the forces, an able and ample writer upon the same side, and by far his most powerful antagonist, may be said to have embodied every argument that would bear upon the question. On the other hand Dr. Chisholm, supported and strengthened by the testimony and conviction of professional men of unquestioned eminence, published an animated reply to his opponents, in order, as he states, "to correct the pernicious doctrines promulgated by Dr. Edward Miller, and other American physicians." This reply appeared in 1809, in an octavo volume, under the title of "A Letter to JOHN HAYGARTH, M. D., F. R. S. &c." In 1813 Dr. Chisholm also wrote a very spirited answer to the remarks of Dr. Bancroft, which appeared in the Edinburgh Medical Journal, for October, 1813.

This important controversy, involving in its progress many men of distinguished talents on both sides, and pervading almost every quarter of the world, was maintained with all the zeal and ardour

which its importance warranted, and which is usually manifested by its warmest partizan.

Polemical writings, however displeasing to the disputants, if conducted with perfect candour and dignity, are undoubtedly instrumental to the advancement of knowledge,* important facts, and new lights are often elicited by the controversialists, in support or refutation of their respective hypotheses; so that the calm and dispassionate inquirer, by reasoning upon, examining, and comparing the facts and legitimate arguments propounded by each party, has a better chance of discovering the truth, and forming a right judgment, than a person who should come to the inquiry with a mind previously made up, or at least tinctured with the tenets and dogmas of party. On a point of such importance to the health, and safety of the human race, and to the commercial and political interests of the community, this eager controversy was of no small advantage; and, although the points at issue among the disputants for so many years, have not been so satisfactorily accorded as could be desired, yet the acrimony of the contest is worn off, and this once intricate, and much agitated question, has been so much narrowed, that its discussion has been productive of considerable benefit, not only to the profession, but to the human race.

After his return from the West Indies, Dr. Chisholm resided chiefly at Bristol, or Clifton, where his talents as a physician, we understand, were highly estimated. His time was in a great measure divided between his professional pursuits and writing contributions to medical science; the latter, (some of which are very valuable,) were, for the most part, published in the form of essays in the *Edinburgh Medical Journal*, one of the oldest and most respectable periodical publications in Europe, and edited by his friend Dr. DUNCAN. A list of his writings is annexed to this memoir. In the year 1819 Dr. Chisholm went over to Switzerland for the better education of his children, and resided mostly at Geneva. During the leisure afforded by this Alpine retirement, he wrote, and bequeathed to his surviving professional brethren his last essay, entitled "*A Manual of the Climate and Diseases of Tropical Countries, &c.*" Of this work, which is chiefly intended for young tropical practitioners, and which was avowedly undertaken at the desire of, and is dedicated to his old and esteemed friend, Sir JAMES M'GRIGOR, director-general of

* Truth results from discussion and from controversy.—*Paley's Mor. and Polit. Philos. Vol. II. p. 346.*

the army medical department; himself a valuable contributor and benefactor to medical science and improvements; of this work, whether we regard its intrinsic merits, or its practical utility, it is impossible to speak in terms of too high commendation. After the completion of this work, Dr. Chisholm made a tour through Switzerland and Italy, and returned to England in May, 1824. He had been for some time suffering under a painful malady, of which he died on the 2d of February, 1825, in the 69th year of his age, at old Burlington street, London.

On a review of the writings of Dr. Chisholm, it will be allowed that his talents, both as a physician and as an author, were of a superior order. Altogether he must be regarded as a man of no ordinary science. To the possession of great industry, a mind ardent and enlightened, he added literary and philosophical acquirements, in a very considerable degree. His writings are distinguished by a style, at once perspicuous, classical, and nervous; characterized, at the same time, by a warmth and earnestness of language, certainly not always conciliatory in his controversial essays, and which convey an appearance of acerbity, particularly to those persons whose opinions it was his object to combat. In controversies not governed by the rules of strict impartiality, it is too often the practice of the disputants, to suppress, garble, or overlook facts and circumstances which militate against their own opinions; to permit their passions to have a share in the question; to be over-strenuous in their own cause; more ready and anxious to impute error to their opponents than to acknowledge it in themselves, and search after truth purely for its own sake. In regard to the controversy in which Dr. Chisholm was involved, we may observe, that, when carried away by his earnestness in maintaining his tenets, the manner of reasoning which he adopted was not always the best calculated to propitiate and convince his opponents; yet his arguments were the result of conviction, expressed with an honest and manly freedom, and dictated by a mind zealously directed to the cause which it was his grand object to defend.

His professional knowledge and experience we have already said was highly appreciated in the West Indies, and he doubtless is entitled to the meed of praise for his meritorious labours in the field of medical science. He was the first to recommend and inculcate a more liberal employment of mercurials, and of introducing an improved and more decided line of treatment in the fevers of that country—a practice that had, to a great degree, obtained, and been found successful in the same class of diseases in India.

With respect to his medical doctrines it may be said, that if uniform and consistent faith, entertained for a long course of years; if sincerity, uprightness of intention, and moral excellence, give an additional portion of weight and validity to his opinions, Dr. Chisholm, to the day of his death, steadfastly adhered to, and most conscientiously believed in all he had written upon the subject of contagion, while the correctness of his pathological and therapeutical views on febrile diseases, was confirmed and exemplified by the success of his subsequent practice.

“In private life, Dr. Chisholm,” to use the words of a dear and very intimate friend, “was most amiable, and for the world, too much devoid ‘of guile;’ in the relations of husband and parent, ‘affectionate and indulgent.’”

Dr. Chisholm enjoyed the friendship and correspondence of several eminent men. He was one of the oldest Fellows of the Royal Society, a member of the Wernerian Society of Edinburgh, of the Philosophical, Medical, and Natural History Societies of New York and Philadelphia; of the Physical and Natural History Society of Geneva; and of the Helvetic Society, for promoting the science of Switzerland.

It is understood that Dr. Chisholm has left a valuable MS. on the medical topography of the countries he visited on the continent, which it is hoped will be given to the world.

Whatever professional opponents Dr. Chisholm may have unfortunately left behind him, it is certain that he himself died in Christian charity and good will to all. It is not perhaps possible to produce a more affecting, pious, and sincere valedictory address, nor one more calculated to disarm hostility, than that which, in reference to medical controversy, he makes to his professional brethren in his last publication, the “Manual of Tropical Diseases,” with a short extract from which we shall conclude this sketch. “If ever,” says the truly benevolent author, “any remark, or any language of mine have given pain or offence; if ever I have betrayed animosity in the maintenance of my own, or asperity in the consideration of another’s opinion; fully aware of the absurdity of a conduct, which the frailty of human nature, and the limited knowledge and capacity of man can give no sanction to, I here solemnly abjure, and intreat pardon for.”

* Manual of Tropical Diseases, p. 233.

A List of the Publications and Writings of the late Dr. Chisholm, as far as they are known to the Author of the foregoing Memoir.

PUBLICATIONS.

1. An Essay on the Malignant Pestilential Fever introduced into the West India Islands, from Boullam on the Coast of Guinea, as it appeared in 1793 and 1794. 8vo. 1794.
2. A second edition, greatly enlarged, of the same work. In 2 vols. 8vo. 1801.
3. A Letter to John Haygarth, M. D., F. R. S. Lond. and Edin. &c. from Colin Chisholm, M. D., F. R. S. Author of an Essay on the Pestilential Fever, exhibiting farther Evidence of the Infectious nature of this Fatal Distemper in Grenada, during 1793-4-5-6, and in the United States of America, from 1793 to 1805, in order to correct the pernicious doctrines promulgated by Dr. Edward Miller, and other American Physicians, relative to this destructive Pestilence. In 1 vol. 8vo. 1809.
4. A Manual of the Climate and Diseases of Tropical Countries, in which a Practical View of the Statistical Pathology, and of the History and Treatment of the Diseases of those Countries is attempted to be given. Calculated chiefly as a Guide to the young Medical Practitioner, on his first visiting those countries. 1 vol. 8vo. 1822.

ESSAYS OR PAPERS.

In the Edinburgh Medical and Surgical Journal.

1. History of a Singular Affection of the Liver, which prevailed epidemically in some parts of the West Indies, Anno. 1786.
2. Observations on the Influenza, as it lately appeared in the West Indies. 1790.
3. History of an uncommon Epidemic Fever observed in the Island of Grenada. 1793.
4. Remarks on the Bignonia Ophthalmia, or Eye Root. 1794.
5. Cases of Yaws and Leprosy treated with Nitrous Acid and Oxygenated Muriate of Potash. 1800.
6. Curious Case of Spasmodic Affection of the Face, cured by the Oxygenated Muriate of Potash. 1800.
7. A short account of the Epidemic Polypus of Grenada, in 1790.
8. On the Poison of Fish. 1808.
9. Case in which the Cæsarian Operation was successfully performed, twice on the same woman. 1808.
10. On the Lues Bovina Intertropia. 1810.
11. An Essay towards an Inquiry how far the Effluvia from Dead

Bodies passing through the natural Process of Putrefaction, are efficient in the production of Malignant Pestilential Fevers. 1810.

12. Case of Ruptured Spleen and Liver by External Injury, with Remarks. 1811.

13. Letter on the Yellow Fever at Perth Amboy, with a Report of the Board of Health at New York on Yellow Fever. 1812.

14. Observations on some Remarks of Dr. Bancroft, contained in the Seventh Appendix to his Essay on the Disease called Yellow Fever; together with Additional Testimonies.

15. Remarks on Contagious Fevers. 1814.

16. On the Malis Dracunculus, or Guinea Worm. 1815.

17. On the Statistical Pathology of Bristol and Clifton, Gloucestershire. 1817.

In the Medico-Chirurgical Transactions of London, Vol. IV.

Remarks on the Use of Mercury in severe Affections of the Brain. 1813.

In the New York Medical and Philosophical Register.

1. Observations on Arsenic and Muriate of Lime in the treatment of Scrofula.

2. On the Oil of Turpentine.

3. On Contagious Diseases.

4. On the Varieties of the Human Species.

5. Account of a Nation of Pigmies.

In the New York Medical Repository.

An Account of the Cachexia Africana.